CHAPTER THE NINTH

MR. BRUMLEY IS TROUBLED BY DIFFICULT IDEAS

§1

Then as that picture of a post office pane, smashed and with a large hole knocked clean through it, fades at last upon the reader's consciousness, let another and a kindred spectacle replace it. It is the carefully cleaned and cherished window of Mr. Brumley's mind, square and tidy and as it were "frosted" against an excess of light, and in that also we have now to record the most jagged all and devastating fractures.

Little did Mr. Brumley reckon when first he looked up from his laces at Black Strand, how completely that pretty young woman in the dark furs was destined to shatter all the assumptions that had served his life.

But you have already had occasion to remark a change in Mr. Brumley's bearing and attitude that carries him far from the kindly and humorous conservatism of his earlier work. You have shared Lady Harman's astonishment at the ardour of his few stolen words in the garden, an astonishment that not only grew but flowered in the silences of her captivity, and you know something of the romantic impulses, more at least than she did, that gave his appearance at the little local railway

station so belated and so disreputable a flavour. In the chilly ill-flavoured solitude of her prison cell and with a mind quickened by meagre and distasteful fare, Lady Harman had ample leisure to reflect upon many things, she had already fully acquainted herself with the greater proportion of Mr. Brumley's published works, and she found the utmost difficulty in reconciling the flushed impassioned quality of his few words of appeal, with the moral assumptions of his published opinions. On the whole she was inclined to think that her memory had a little distorted what he had said. In this however she was mistaken; Mr. Brumley had really been proposing an elopement and he was now entirely preoccupied with the idea of rescuing, obtaining and possessing Lady Harman for himself as soon as the law released her.

One may doubt whether this extensive change from a humorous conservatism to a primitive and dangerous romanticism is to be ascribed entirely to the personal charm, great as it no doubt was, of Lady Harman; rather did her tall soft dark presence come to release a long accumulating store of discontent and unrest beneath the polished surfaces of Mr. Brumley's mind. Things had been stirring in him for some time; the latter Euphemia books had lacked much of the freshness of their precursors and he had found it increasingly hard, he knew not why, to keep up the lightness, the geniality, the friendly badinage of successful and accepted things, the sunny disregard of the grim and unamiable aspects of existence, that were the essential merits of that Optimistic Period of our literature in which Mr. Brumley had begun his career. With every justification in the world Mr. Brumley had set out to be an optimist,

even in the Granta his work had been distinguished by its gay yet steadfast superficiality, and his early success, his rapid popularity, had done much to turn this early disposition into a professional attitude. He had determined that for all his life he would write for comfortable untroubled people in the character of a light-spirited, comfortable, untroubled person, and that each year should have its book of connubial humour, its travel in picturesque places, its fun and its sunshine, like roses budding in succession on a stem. He did his utmost to conceal from himself the melancholy realization that the third and the fourth roses were far less wonderful than the first and the second, and that by continuing the descending series a rose might be attained at last that was almost unattractive, but he was already beginning to suspect that he was getting less animated and a little irritable when Euphemia very gently and gracefully but very firmly and rather enigmatically died, and after an interval of tender and tenderly expressed regrets he found himself, in spite of the most strenuous efforts to keep bright and kindly and optimistic in the best style, dull and getting duller--he could disguise the thing no longer. And he weighed more. Six--eight--eleven pounds more. He took a flat in London, dined and lunched out lightly but frequently, sought the sympathetic friendship of several charming ladies, and involved himself deeply in the affairs of the Academic Committee. Indeed he made a quite valiant struggle to feel that optimism was just where it always had been and everything all right and very bright with him and with the world about him. He did not go under without a struggle. But as Max Beerbohm's caricature--the 1908 one I mean--brought out all too plainly, there was

in his very animation, something of the alert liveliness of the hunted man. Do what he would he had a terrible irrational feeling that things, as yet scarce imagined things, were after him and would have him. Even as he makes his point, even as he gesticulates airily, with his rather distinctively North European nose Beerbohmically enlarged and his sensitive nostril in the air, he seems to be looking at something he does not want to look at, something conceivably pursuing, out of the corner of his eye.

The thing that was assailing Mr. Brumley and making his old established humour and tenderness seem dull and opaque and giving this new uneasy quality to his expression was of course precisely the thing that Sir Isaac meant when he talked about "idees" and their disturbing influence upon all the once assured tranquillities and predominances of Putney life. It was criticism breaking bounds.

As a basis and substance for the tissue of whimsically expressed happiness and confident appreciation of the good things of life, which Mr. Brumley had set before himself as his agreeable--and it was to be hoped popular and profitable--life-task, certain assumptions had been necessary. They were assumptions he had been very willing to make and which were being made in the most exemplary way by the writers who were succeeding all about him at the commencement of his career. And these assumptions had had such an air then of being quite trustworthy, as being certain to wash and wear! Already nowadays it is difficult to get them stated; they have become incredible while still too near to justify

the incredibility that attaches to history. It was assumed, for example, that in the institutions, customs and culture of the middle Victorian period, humanity had, so far as the broad lines of things are concerned, achieved its goal. There were of course still bad men and women--individually--and classes one had to recognize as "lower," but all the main things were right, general ideas were right; the law was right, institutions were right, Consols and British Railway Debentures were right and were going to keep right for ever. The Abolition of Slavery in America had been the last great act which had inaugurated this millennium. Except for individual instances the tragic intensities of life were over now and done with; there was no more need for heroes and martyrs; for the generality of humanity the phase of genial comedy had begun. There might be improvements and refinements ahead, but social, political and economic arrangement were now in their main outlines settled for good and all; nothing better was possible and it was the agreeable task of the artist and the man of letters to assist and celebrate this establishment. There was to be much editing of Shakespear and Charles Lamb, much delightful humour and costume romance, and an Academy of refined Fine Writers would presently establish belles-lettres on the reputable official basis, write finis to creative force and undertake the task of stereotyping the language. Literature was to have its once terrible ferments reduced to the quality of a helpful pepsin. Ideas were dead--or domesticated. The last wild idea, in an impoverished and pitiful condition, had been hunted down and killed in the mobbing of, "The Woman Who Did." For a little time the world did actually watch a phase of English writing that dared nothing,

penetrated nothing, suppressed everything and aspired at most to Charm, creep like a transitory patch of sunlight across a storm-rent universe. And vanish....

At no time was it a perfectly easy task to pretend that the crazy makeshifts of our legal and political systems, the staggering accidents of economic relationship, the festering disorder of contemporary philosophy and religious teaching, the cruel and stupid bed of King Og that is our last word in sexual adjustment, really constituted a noble and enduring sanity, and it became less and less so with the acute disillusionments that arose out of the Boer War. The first decade of the twentieth century was for the English a decade of badly sprained optimism. Our Empire was nearly beaten by a handful of farmers amidst the jeering contempt of the whole world--and we felt it acutely for several years. We began to question ourselves. Mr. Brumley found his gay but entirely respectable irresponsibility harder and harder to keep up as that decade wore on. And close upon the South African trouble came that extraordinary new discontent of women with a woman's lot which we have been observing as it reached and troubled the life of Lady Harman. Women who had hitherto so passively made the bulk of that reading public which sustained Mr. Brumley and his kind--they wanted something else!

And behind and beneath these immediately disconcerting things still more sinister hintings and questioning were beginning to pluck at contentment. In 1899 nobody would have dreamt of asking and in 1909 even Mr. Brumley was asking, "Are things going on much longer?" A hundred

little incidents conspired to suggest that a Christianity that had, to put it mildly, shirked the Darwinian challenge, had no longer the palliating influence demanded of a national religion, and that down there in the deep levels of labour where they built railways to carry Mr. Brumley's food and earn him dividends, where they made engines and instruments and textiles and drains for his little needs, there was a new, less bounded discontent, a grimmer spirit, something that one tried in vain to believe was only the work of "agitators," something that was to be pacified no longer by the thin pretences of liberalism, something that might lead ultimately--optimism scarcely dared to ask whither....

Mr. Brumley did his best to resist the influence of these darkening ideas. He tried to keep it up that everything was going well and that most of these shadows and complaints were the mischief of a few incurably restless personalities. He tried to keep it up that to belong to the working class was a thoroughly jolly thing--for those who were used to it. He declared that all who wanted to alter our laws or our ideas about property or our methods of production were envious and base and all who wanted any change between the sexes, foolish or vicious. He tried to go on disposing of socialists, agitators, feminists, women's suffragists, educationists and every sort of reformer with a good-humoured contempt. And he found an increasing difficulty in keeping his contempt sufficiently good-humoured. Instead of laughing down at folly and failure, he had moments when he felt that he was rather laughing up--a little wryly--at monstrous things impending. And since ideas are things of atmosphere and the spirit, insidious wolves of the

soul, they crept up to him and gnawed the insides out of him even as he posed as their manful antagonist.

Insensibly Mr. Brumley moved with his times. It is the necessary first phase in the break-up of any system of unsound assumptions that a number of its votaries should presently set about padding its cutting corners and relieving the harsh pressure of its injustices by exuberances of humour and sentimentality. Mr. Brumley became charitable and romantic,--orthodox still but charitable and romantic. He was all for smashing with the generalization, but now in the particular instance he was more and more for forgiveness. One finds creeping into the later Euphemia books a Bret-Harte-like doctrine that a great number of bad women are really good and a persuasion in the 'Raffles' key that a large proportion of criminals are really very picturesque and admirable fellows. One wonders how far Mr. Brumley's less ostensible life was softening in harmony with this exterior change, this tender twilight of principle. He wouldn't as yet face the sterner fact that most people who are condemned by society, whether they are condemned justly or not, are by the very gregariousness of man's nature debased, and that a law or custom that stamps you as bad makes you bad. A great state should have high and humane and considerate laws nobly planned, nobly administered and needing none of these shabby little qualifications sotto voce. To find goodness in the sinner and justification in the outcast is to condemn the law, but as yet Mr. Brumley's heart failed where his intelligence pointed towards that conclusion. He hadn't the courage to revise his assumptions about right and wrong to that extent; he just

allowed them to get soft and sloppy. He waded, where there should be firm ground. He waded toward wallowing. This is a perilous way of living and the sad little end of Euphemia, flushed and coughing, left him no doubt in many ways still more exposed to the temptations of the sentimental byway and the emotional gloss. Happily this is a book about Lady Harman and not an exhaustive monograph upon Mr. Brumley. We will at least leave him the refuge of a few shadows.

Occasionally he would write an important signed review for the Twentieth Century or the Hebdomadal Review, and on one such occasion he took in hand several studies of contemporary conditions by various 'New Witnesses,' 'Young Liberals,' New Age rebels and associated insurgent authors. He intended to be rather kindly with them, rather disillusioned, quite sympathetic but essentially conventional and conservative and sane. He sat at a little desk near the drooping Venus, under the benediction of Euphemia's posthumous rose, and turned over the pages of one of the least familiar of the group. The stuff was written with a crude force that at times became almost distinguished, but with a bitterness that he felt he must reprove. And suddenly he came upon a passionate tirade against the present period. It made him nibble softly with his lips at the top of his fountain pen as he read.

"We live," said the writer, "in a second Byzantine age, in one of those multitudinous accumulations of secondary interests, of secondary activities and conventions and colossal intricate insignificances, that lie like dust heaps in the path of the historian. The true history of

such periods is written in bank books and cheque counterfoils and burnt to save individual reputations; it sneaks along under a thousand pretences, it finds its molelike food and safety in the dirt; its outer forms remain for posterity, a huge débris of unfathomable riddles."

"Hm!" said Mr. Brumley. "He slings it out. And what's this?"

"A civilization arrested and decayed, waiting through long inglorious ages of unscheduled crime, unchallenged social injustice, senseless luxury, mercenary politics and universal vulgarity and weakness, for the long overdue scavenging of the Turk."

"I wonder where the children pick up such language," whispered Mr. Brumley with a smile.

But presently he had pushed the book away and was thinking over this novel and unpleasant idea that perhaps after all his age didn't matter as some ages have mattered and as he had hitherto always supposed it did matter. Byzantine, with the gold of life stolen and the swans changed to geese? Of course always there had been a certain qualification upon heroes, even Cæsar had needed a wreath, but at any rate the age of Cæsar had mattered. Kings no doubt might be more kingly and the issues of life plainer and nobler, but this had been true of every age. He tried to weigh values against values, our past against our present, temperately and sanely. Our art might perhaps be keener for beauty than it seemed to be, but still--it flourished. And our science at least was

wonderful--wonderful. There certainly this young detractor of existing things went astray. What was there in Byzantium to parallel with the electric light, the electric tram, wireless telegraphy, aseptic surgery? Of course this about "unchallenged social injustice" was nonsense. Rant. Why! we were challenging social injustice at every general election--plainly and openly. And crime! What could the man mean about unscheduled crime? Mere words! There was of course a good deal of luxury, but not wicked luxury, and to compare our high-minded and constructive politics with the mere conflict of unscrupulous adventurers about that semi-oriental throne! It was nonsense!

"This young man must be spanked," said Mr. Brumley and, throwing aside an open illustrated paper in which a full-length portrait of Sir Edward Carson faced a picture of the King and Queen in their robes sitting side by side under a canopy at the Coronation Durbar, he prepared himself to write in an extremely salutary manner about the follies of the younger generation, and incidentally to justify his period and his professional contentment.

§2

One is reminded of those houses into which the white ants have eaten their way; outwardly still fair and solid, they crumble at the touch of a hand. And now you will begin to understand those changes of bearing that so perplexed Lady Harman, that sudden insurgence of flushed

half-furtive passion in the garden, through the thin pretences of a liberal friendship. His hollow honour had been gripped and had given way.

He had begun so well. At first Lady Harman had occupied his mind in the properest way. She was another man's wife and sacred--according to all honourable standards, and what he wanted was merely to see more of her, talk to her, interest her in himself, share whatever was available outside her connubial obligations,--and think as little of Sir Isaac as possible.

How quickly the imaginative temperament of Mr. Brumley enlarged that to include a critical hostility to Sir Isaac, we have already recorded. Lady Harman was no longer simply a charming, suppressed young wife, crying out for attentive development; she became an ill-treated beautiful woman--misunderstood. Still scrupulously respecting his own standards, Mr. Brumley embarked upon the dangerous business of inventing just how Sir Isaac might be outraging them, and once his imagination had started to hunt in that field, it speedily brought in enough matter for a fine state of moral indignation, a white heat of not altogether justifiable chivalry. Assisted by Lady Beach-Mandarin Mr. Brumley had soon converted the little millionaire into a matrimonial ogre to keep an anxious lover very painfully awake at nights. Because by that time and quite insensibly he had become an anxious lover--with all the gaps in the thread of realities that would have made him that, quite generously filled up from the world of reverie.

Moral indignation is jealousy with a halo. It is the peculiar snare of the perplexed orthodox, and soon Mr. Brumley was in a state of nearly unendurable moral indignation with Sir Isaac for a hundred exaggerations of what he was and of what conceivably he might have done to his silent yet manifestly unsuitably mated wife. And now that romantic streak which is as I have said the first certain symptom of decay in a system of moral assumptions began to show itself in Mr. Brumley's thoughts and conversation. "A marriage like that," said Mr. Brumley to Lady Beach-Mandarin, "isn't a marriage. It flouts the True Ideal of Marriage. It's slavery--following a kidnapping...."

But this is a wide step from the happy optimism of the Cambridge days. What becomes of the sanctity of marriage and the institution of the family when respectable gentlemen talk of something called "True Marriage," as non-existent in relation to a lady who is already the mother of four children? I record this lapsing of Mr. Brumley into romanticism without either sympathy or mitigation. The children, it presently became apparent, were not "true" children. "Forced upon her," said Mr. Brumley. "It makes one ill to think of it!" It certainly very nearly made him ill. And as if these exercises in distinction had inflamed his conscience Mr. Brumley wrote two articles in the Hebdomadal denouncing impure literature, decadence, immorality, various recent scandalous instances, and the suffragettes, declaring that woman's place was the home and that "in a pure and exalted monogamy lies the sole unitary basis for a civilized state." The most remarkable

thing about this article is an omission. That Sir Isaac's monogamy with any other instances that might be akin to it was not pure and exalted, and that it needed--shall we call it readjustment? is a view that in this article Mr. Brumley conspicuously doesn't display. It's as if for a moment, pen in hand, he had eddied back to his old absolute positions....

In a very little while Mr. Brumley and Lady Beach-Mandarin had almost persuaded each other that Sir Isaac was applying physical torture to his proudly silent wife, and Mr. Brumley was no longer dreaming and glancing at but steadily facing the possibility of a pure-minded and handsomely done elopement to "free" Lady Harman, that would be followed in due course by a marriage, a "true marriage" on a level of understanding far above any ordinary respectable wedding, amidst universal sympathy and admiration and the presence of all the very best people. In these anticipations he did rather remarkably overlook the absence of any sign of participation on the part of Lady Harman in his own impassioned personal feelings, and he overlooked still more remarkably as possible objections to his line of conduct, Millicent, Florence, Annette and Baby. These omissions no doubt simplified but also greatly falsified his outlook.

This proposal that all the best people shall applaud the higher rightness that was to be revealed in his projected elopement, is in the very essence of the romantic attitude. All other people are still to remain under the law. There is to be nothing revolutionary. But with

exceptional persons under exceptional conditions----

Mr. Brumley stated his case over and over again to his utmost satisfaction, and always at great moral altitudes and with a kind of transcendent orthodoxy. The more difficult any aspect of the affair appeared from the orthodox standpoint the more valiantly Mr. Brumley soared; if it came to his living with Lady Harman for a time before they could be properly married amidst picturesque foreign scenery in a little casa by the side of a stream, then the water in that stream was to be quite the purest water conceivable and the scenery and associations as morally faultless as a view that had passed the exacting requirements of Mr. John Ruskin. And Mr. Brumley was very clear in his mind that what he proposed to do was entirely different in quality even if it was similar in form from anything that anyone else had ever done who had ever before made a scandal or appeared in the divorce court. This is always the way in such cases--always. The scandal was to be a noble scandal, a proud scandal, one of those instances of heroical love that turn aside misdemeanours--admittedly misdemeanours--into edifying marvels.

This was the state of mind to which Mr. Brumley had attained when he made his ineffectual raid upon Black Strand, and you will remark about it, if you are interested in the changes in people's ideas that are going on to-day, that although he was prepared to make the most extensive glosses in this particular instance upon the commonly accepted rules of what is right and proper, he was not for a moment prepared to accord the terrible gift of an independent responsibility to Lady

Harman. In that direction lay regions that Mr. Brumley had still to explore. Lady Harman he considered was married wrongly and disastrously and this he held to be essentially the fault of Sir Isaac--with perhaps some slight blame attaching to Lady Harman's mother. The only path of escape he could conceive as yet for Lady Harman lay through the chivalry of some other man. That a woman could possibly rebel against one man without the sympathy and moral maintenance of another was still outside the range of Mr. Brumley's understanding. It is still outside the range of most men's understandings--and of a great many women's. If he generalized at all from these persuasions it was in the direction that in the interest of "true marriage" there should be greater facilities for divorce and also a kind of respectable-ization of divorce. Then these "false marriages" might be rectified without suffering. The reasons for divorce he felt should be extended to include things not generally reprehensible, and chivalrous people coming into court should be protected from the indelicate publicity of free reporting....

§3

Mr. Brumley was still contemplating rather inconclusively the possibility of a long and intimate talk leading up to and preparing for an elopement with Lady Harman, when he read of her Jago Street escapade and of her impending appearance at the South Hampsmith police court. He was astonished. The more he contemplated the thing the greater became his astonishment.

Even at the first impact he realized that the line she had taken wasn't quite in the picture with the line he had proposed for her. He felt--left out. He felt as though a door had slammed between himself and affairs to which he had supposed himself essential. He could not understand why she had done this thing instead of coming straight to his flat and making use of all that chivalrous service she surely knew was at her disposal. This self-reliance, this direct dealing with the world, seemed to him, even in the height of his concern, unwomanly, a deeper injury to his own abandoned assumptions than any he had contemplated. He felt it needed explanation, and he hurried to secure an elbowed unsavoury corner in the back of the court in order to hear her defence. He had to wait through long stuffy spaces of time before she appeared. There were half a dozen other window smashers,--plain or at least untidy-looking young women. The magistrate told them they were silly and the soul of Mr. Brumley acquiesced. One tried to make a speech, and it was such a poor speech--squeaky....

When at last Lady Harman entered the box--the strangest place it seemed for her--he tried to emerge from the jostling crowd about him into visibility, to catch her eye, to give her the support of his devoted presence. Twice at least she glanced in his direction but gave no sign of seeing him. He was surprised that she could look without fear or detestation, indeed once with a gesture of solicitude, at Sir Isaac. She was astonishingly serene. There seemed to be just the faintest shadow of a smile about her lips as the stipendiary explained the impossibility

of giving her anything less than a month. An uneasy object like the smashed remains of a colossal box of bonbons that was riding out a gale, down in the middle of the court, turned round at last completely and revealed itself as the hat of Lady Beach-Mandarin, but though Mr. Brumley waved his hand he could not even make that lady aware of his presence. A powerful rude criminal-looking man who stood in front of him and smelt grossly of stables, would not give him a fair chance of showing himself, and developed a strong personal hostility to him on account of his alleged "shoving about." It would not he felt be of the slightest help to Lady Harman for him to involve himself in a personal struggle with a powerful and powerfully flavoured criminal.

It was all very dreadful.

After the proceedings were over and Lady Harman had been led away into captivity, he went out and took a taxi in an agitated distraught manner to Lady Beach-Mandarin's house.

"She meant," said Lady Beach-Mandarin, "to have a month's holiday from him and think things out. And she's got it."

Perhaps that was it. Mr. Brumley could not tell, and he spent some days in that state of perplexity which, like the weariness that heralds a cold, marks so often the onset of a new series of ideas....

Why hadn't she come to him? Had he after all rather overloaded his

memory of her real self with imaginative accessories? Had she really understood what he had been saying to her in the garden? Afterwards when he had met her eyes as he and she went over the new wing with Sir Isaac she had so manifestly--and, when one came to think of it, so tranquilly--seemed to understand....

It was such an extraordinary thing to go smashing a window like that--when there he was at hand ready to help her. She knew his address? Did she? For a moment Mr. Brumley cherished that wild surmise. Was that perhaps it? But surely she could have looked in the Telephone Directory or Who's Who....

But if that was the truth of the matter she would have looked and behaved differently in court--quite differently. She would have been looking for him. She would have seen him....

It was queer too to recall what she had said in court about her daughters....

Could it be, he had a frightful qualm, that after all--he wasn't the man? How little he knew of her really....

"This wretched agitation," said Mr. Brumley, trying to flounder away anyhow from these disconcerting riddles; "it seems to unbalance them all."

But he found it impossible to believe that Lady Harman was seriously unbalanced.

§4

And if Mr. Brumley's system of romantically distorted moral assumptions was shattered by Lady Harman's impersonal blow at a post office window when all the rules seemed to require her to fly from the oppression of one man to the chivalry of another, what words can convey the devastating effect upon him of her conduct after her release? To that crisis he had been looking forward continually; to record the variety of his expectations would fill a large volume, but throughout them all prevailed one general idea, that when she came out of prison her struggle with her husband would be resumed, and that this would give Mr. Brumley such extraordinary opportunities of displaying his devotion that her response, which he was now beginning to suspect might be more reluctant than his earlier dreams had assumed, was ultimately inevitable. In all these dreams and meditations that response figured as the crown. He had to win and possess Lady Harman. The idea had taken hold of his busy yet rather pointless life, had become his directing object. He was full of schemes for presently arresting and captivating her imagination. He was already convinced that she cared for him; he had to inflame interest and fan liking into the fire of passion. And with a mind so occupied, Mr. Brumley wrote this and that and went about his affairs. He spent two days and a night at Margate visiting his son at

his preparatory school, and he found much material for musing in the question of just how the high romantic affairs ahead of him would affect this delicately intelligent boy. For a time perhaps he might misjudge his father.... He spent a week-end with Lady Viping and stayed on until Wednesday and then he came back to London. His plans were still unformed when the day came for Lady Harman's release, and indeed beyond an idea that he would have her met at the prison gates by an enormous bunch of snowy-white and crimson chrysanthemums he had nothing really concrete at all in his mind.

She had, however, been released stealthily a day before her time, and this is what she had done. She had asked that--of all improbable people!--Sir Isaac's mother should meet her, the biggest car had come to the prison gates, and she had gone straight down with Mrs. Harman to her husband--who had taken a chill and was in bed drinking Contrexéville water--at Black Strand.

As these facts shaped themselves in answer to the blanched inquiries of Mr. Brumley his amazement grew. He began to realize that there must have been a correspondence during her incarceration, that all sorts of things had been happening while he had been dreaming, and when he went round to Lady Beach-Mandarin, who was just packing up to be the life and soul of a winter-sports party at a nice non-Lunnite hotel at Lenzerheide, he learnt particulars that chilled him to the marrow. "They've made it up," said Lady Beach-Mandarin.

"But how?" gasped Mr. Brumley, with his soul in infinite distress. "But how?"

"The Ogre, it seems, has come to see that bullying won't do. He's given in tremendously. He's let her have her way with the waitress strike and she's going to have an allowance of her own and all kinds of things. It's settled. It's his mother and that man Charterson talked him over. You know--his mother came to me--as her friend. For advice. Wanted to find out what sort of things we might have been putting in her head. She said so. A curious old thing--vulgar but--wise. I liked her. He's her darling--and she just knows what he is.... He doesn't like it but he's taken his dose. The thought of her going to prison again----! He's let her do anything rather than that...."

"And she's gone to him!"

"Naturally," said Lady Beach-Mandarin with what he felt to be deliberate brutality. Surely she must have understood----

"But the waitress strike--what has it got to do with the waitress strike?"

"She cared--tremendously."

"Did she?"

"Tremendously. And they all go back and the system of inspection is being altered, and he's even forgiven Babs Wheeler. It made him ill to do it but he did."

"And she's gone back to him."

"Like Godiva," said Lady Beach-Mandarin with that sweeping allusiveness that was part of her complicated charm.

§5

For three days Mr. Brumley was so staggered by these things that it did not occur to him that it was quite possible for him to see Lady Harman for himself and find out just how things stood. He remained in London with an imagination dazed. And as it was the Christmas season and as George Edmund in a rather expectant holiday state had now come up from Margate, Mr. Brumley went in succession to the Hippodrome, to Peter Pan and to an exhibition at Olympia, assisted at an afternoon display of the kinemacolor at La Scala Theatre, visited Hamley's and lunched George Edmund once at the Criterion and twice at the Climax Club, while thinking of nothing in all the world but the incalculable strangeness of women. George Edmund thought him a very passive leadable parent indeed, less querulous about money matters and altogether much improved. The glitter and colour of these various entertainments reflected themselves upon the surface of that deep flood of meditation, hook-armed

wooden-legged pirates, intelligent elephants, ingenious but extremely expensive toys, flickering processions, comic turns, snatches of popular music and George Edmund's way of eating an orange, pictured themselves on his mind confusedly without in any way deflecting its course. Then on the fourth day he roused himself, gave George Edmund ten shillings to get himself a cutlet at the Café Royal and do the cinematographs round and about the West End, and so released reached Aleham in time for a temperate lunch. He chartered the Aleham car to take him to Black Strand and arrived there about a quarter past three, in a great effort to feel himself a matter-of-course visitor.

It ought to be possible to record that Mr. Brumley's mind was full of the intensest sense of Lady Harman during that journey and of nothing else, but as a matter of fact his mind was now curiously detached and reflective, the tensions and expectation of the past month and the astonishment of the last few days had worked themselves out and left him as it were the passive instrument of the purpose of his more impassioned moods. This distressed lover approached Black Strand in a condition of philosophical lassitude.

The road from Aleham to Black Strand is a picturesque old English road, needlessly winding and badly graded, wriggling across a healthy wilderness with occasional pine-woods. Something in that familiar landscape--for his life had run through it since first he and Euphemia on a tandem bicycle and altogether very young had sought their ideal home in the South of England--set his mind swinging and generalizing.

How freshly youthful he and Euphemia had been when first he came along that road, how crude, how full of happy expectations of success; it had been as bright and it was now as completely gone as the sunsets they had seen together.

How great a thing life is! How much greater than any single romance, or any individual affection! Since those days he had grown, he had succeeded, he had suffered in a reasonable way of course, still he could recall with a kind of satisfaction tears and deep week-long moods of hopeless melancholy--and he had changed. And now dominating this landscape, filling him with new emotions and desires and perplexing intimations of ignorance and limitations he had never suspected in his youth, was this second figure of a woman. She was different from Euphemia. With Euphemia everything had been so simple and easy; until that slight fading, that fatigue of entire success and satisfaction, of the concluding years. He and Euphemia had always kept it up that they had no thought in the world except for one another.... Yet if that had been true, why hadn't he died when she did. He hadn't died--with remarkable elasticity. Clearly in his case there had been these unexplored, unsuspected hinterlands of possibility towards which Lady Harman seemed now to be directing him. It came to him that afternoon as an entirely fresh thought that there might also have been something in Euphemia beyond their simple, so charmingly treated relationship. He began to recall moments when Euphemia had said perplexing little things, had looked at him with an expression that was unexpected, had been--difficult....

I write of Mr. Brumley to tell you things about him and not to explain him. It may be that the appetite for thorough good talks with people grows upon one, but at any rate it did occur to Mr. Brumley on his way to talk to Lady Harman, it occurred to him as a thing distressingly irrevocable that he could now never have a thorough good talk with Euphemia about certain neglected things between them. It would have helped him so much....

His eyes rested as he thought of these things upon the familiar purple hill crests, patched that afternoon with the lingering traces of a recent snowstorm, the heather slopes, the dark mysterious woods, the patches of vivid green where a damp and marshy meadow or so broke the moorland surface. To-day in spite of the sun there was a bright blue-white line of frost to the northward of every hedge and bank, the trees were dripping down the white edgings of the morning into the pine-needle mud at their feet; he had seen it so like this before; years hence he might see it all like this again; all this great breezy countryside had taken upon itself a quality of endurance, as though it would still be real and essential in his mind when Lady Harman had altogether passed again. It would be real when he himself had passed away, and in other costumes and other vehicles fresh Euphemias and new crude George Brumleys would come along, feeling in the ultimate bright new wisdom of youth that it was all for them--a subservient scenery, when really it was entirely indifferent in its careless permanence to all their hopes and fancies....

§6

Mr. Brumley's thoughts on the permanence of landscape and the mutability of human affairs were more than a little dashed when he came within sight of Black Strand and perceived that once cosily beautiful little home clipped and extended, its shrubbery wrecked and the old barn now pierced with windows and adorned--for its new chimneys were not working very well--by several efficient novelties in chimney cowls. Up the slopes behind Sir Isaac had extended his boundaries, and had been felling trees and levelling a couple of tennis courts for next summer.

Something was being done to the porch, and the jasmine had been cleared away altogether. Mr. Brumley could not quite understand what was in progress; Sir Isaac he learnt afterwards had found a wonderful bargain in a real genuine Georgian portal of great dignity and simplicity in Aleham, and he was going to improve Black Strand by transferring it thither--with the utmost precaution and every piece numbered--from its original situation. Mr. Brumley stood among the preparatory débris of this and rang a quietly resolute electric bell, which was answered no longer by Mrs. Rabbit but by the ample presence of Snagsby.

Snagsby in that doorway had something of the preposterous effect of a very large face beneath a very small hat. He had to Mr. Brumley's eyes a restored look, as though his self-confidence had been thoroughly done up

since their last encounter. Bygones were bygones. Mr. Brumley was admitted as one is admitted to any normal home. He was shown into the little study-drawing-room with the stepped floor, which had been so largely the scene of his life with Euphemia, and he was left there for the better part of a quarter of an hour before his hostess appeared.

The room had been changed very little. Euphemia's solitary rose had gone, and instead there were several bowls of beaten silver scattered about, each filled with great chrysanthemums from London. Sir Isaac's jackdaw acquisitiveness had also overcrowded the corner beyond the fireplace with a very fine and genuine Queen Anne cabinet; there were a novel by Elizabeth Robins and two or three feminist and socialist works lying on the table which would certainly not have been visible, though they might have been in the house, during the Brumley régime. Otherwise things were very much as they always had been.

A room like this, thought Mr. Brumley among much other mental driftage, is like a heart,--so long as it exists it must be furnished and tenanted. No matter what has been, however bright and sweet and tender, the spaces still cry aloud to be filled again. The very essence of life is its insatiability. How complete all this had seemed in the moment when first he and Euphemia had arranged it. And indeed how complete life had seemed altogether at seven-and-twenty. Every year since then he had been learning--or at any rate unlearning. Until at last he was beginning to realize he had still everything to learn....

The door opened and the tall dark figure of Lady Harman stood for a moment in the doorway before she stepped down into the room.

She had always the same effect upon him, the effect of being suddenly remembered. When he was away from her he was always sure that she was a beautiful woman, and when he saw her again he was always astonished to see how little he had borne her beauty in mind. For a moment they regarded one another silently. Then she closed the door behind her and came towards him.

All Mr. Brumley's philosophizing had vanished at the sight of her. His spirit was reborn within him. He thought of her and of his effect upon her, vividly, and of nothing else in the world.

She was paler he thought beneath her dusky hair, a little thinner and graver....

There was something in her manner as she advanced towards him that told him he mattered to her, that his coming there was something that moved her imagination as well as his own. With an almost impulsive movement she held out both her hands to him, and with an inspiration as sudden he took them and kissed them. When he had done so he was ashamed of his temerity; he looked up to meet in her dark eyes the scared shyness of a fallow deer. She suddenly remembered to withdraw her hands, and it became manifest to both of them that the incident must never have happened. She went to the window, stood almost awkwardly for a moment

looking out of it, then turned. She put her hands on the back of the chair and stood holding it.

"I knew you would come to see me," she said.

"I've been very anxious about you," he said, and on that their minds rested through a little silence.

"You see," he explained, "I didn't know what was happening to you. Or what you were doing."

"After asking your advice," she said.

"Exactly."

"I don't know why I broke that window. Except I think that I wanted to get away."

"But why didn't you come to me?"

"I didn't know where you were. And besides--I didn't somehow want to come to you."

"But wasn't it wretched in prison? Wasn't it miserably cold? I used to think of you of nights in some wretched ill-aired cell.... You...."

"It was cold," she admitted. "But it was very good for me. It was quiet. The first few days seemed endless; then they began to go by quickly. Quite quickly at last. And I came to think. In the day there was a little stool where one sat. I used to sit on that and brood and try to think things out--all sorts of things I've never had the chance to think about before."

"Yes," said Mr. Brumley.

"All this," she said.

"And it has brought you back here!" he said, with something of the tone of one who has a right to enquire, with some flavour too of reproach.

"You see," she said after a little pause, "during that time it was possible to come to understandings. Neither I nor my husband had understood the other. In that interval it was possible--to explain.

"Yes. You see, Mr. Brumley, we--we both misunderstood. It was just because of that and because I had no one who seemed able to advise me that I turned to you. A novelist always seems so wise in these things. He seems to know so many lives. One can talk to you as one can scarcely talk to anyone; you are a sort of doctor--in these matters. And it was necessary--that my husband should realize that I had grown up and that I should have time to think just how one's duty and one's--freedom have to be fitted together.... And my husband is ill. He has been ill, rather

short of breath--the doctor thinks it is asthma--for some time, and all the agitation of this business has upset him and made him worse. He is upstairs now--asleep. Of course if I had thought I should make him ill I could never have done any of this. But it's done now and here I am, Mr. Brumley, back in my place. With all sorts of things changed. Put right...."

"I see," said Mr. Brumley stupidly.

Her speech was like the falling of an opaque curtain upon some romantic spectacle. She stood there, almost defensively behind her chair as she made it. There was a quality of premeditation in her words, yet something in her voice and bearing made him feel that she knew just how it covered up and extinguished his dreams and impulses. He heard her out and then suddenly his spirit rebelled against her decision. "No!" he cried.

She waited for him to go on.

"You see," he said, "I thought that it was just that you wanted to get away----That this life was intolerable----That you were----Forgive me if I seem to be going beyond--going beyond what I ought to be thinking about you. Only, why should I pretend? I care, I care for you tremendously. And it seemed to me that you didn't love your husband, that you were enslaved and miserable. I would have done anything to help you--anything in the world, Lady Harman. I know--it may sound

ridiculous--there have been times when I would have faced death to feel you were happy and free. I thought all that, I felt all that,--and then--then you come back here. You seem not to have minded. As though I had misunderstood...."

He paused and his face was alive with an unwonted sincerity. His self-consciousness had for a moment fallen from him.

"I know," she said, "it was like that. I knew you cared. That is why I have so wanted to talk to you. It looked like that...."

She pressed her lips together in that old familiar hunt for words and phrases.

"I didn't understand, Mr. Brumley, all there was in my husband or all there was in myself. I just saw his hardness and his--his hardness in business. It's become so different now. You see, I forgot he has bad health. He's ill; I suppose he was getting ill then. Instead of explaining himself--he was--excited and--unwise. And now----"

"Now I suppose he has--explained," said Mr. Brumley slowly and with infinite distaste. "Lady Harman, what has he explained?"

"It isn't so much that he has explained, Mr. Brumley," said Lady Harman, "as that things have explained themselves."

"But how, Lady Harman? How?"

"I mean about my being a mere girl, almost a child when I married him. Naturally he wanted to take charge of everything and leave nothing to me. And quite as naturally he didn't notice that now I am a woman, grown up altogether. And it's been necessary to do things. And naturally, Mr. Brumley, they shocked and upset him. But he sees now so clearly, he wrote to me, such a fair letter--an unusual letter--quite different from when he talks--it surprised me, telling me he wanted me to feel free, that he meant to make me--to arrange things that is, so that I should feel free and more able to go about as I pleased. It was a generous letter, Mr. Brumley. Generous about all sorts of affairs that there had been between us. He said things, quite kind things, not like the things he has ever said before----"

She stopped short and then began again.

"You know, Mr. Brumley, it's so hard to tell things without telling other things that somehow are difficult to tell. Yet if I don't tell you them, you won't know them and then you won't be able to understand in the least how things are with us."

Her eyes appealed to him.

"Tell me," he said, "whatever you think fit."

"When one has been afraid of anyone and felt they were ever so much stronger and cruel and hard than one is and one suddenly finds they aren't. It alters everything."

He nodded, watching her.

Her voice fell nearly to a whisper. "Mr. Brumley," she said, "when I came back to him--you know he was in bed here--instead of scolding me--he cried. He cried like a vexed child. He put his face into the pillow--just misery.... I'd never seen him cry--at least only once--long ago...."

Mr. Brumley looked at her flushed and tender face and it seemed to him that indeed he could die for her quite easily.

"I saw how hard I had been," she said. "In prison I'd thought of that, I'd thought women mustn't be hard, whatever happens to them. And when I saw him like that I knew at once how true that was.... He begged me to be a good wife to him. No!--he just said, 'Be a wife to me,' not even a good wife--and then he cried...."

For a moment or so Mr. Brumley didn't respond. "I see," he said at last. "Yes."

"And there were the children--such helpless little things. In the prison I worried about them. I thought of things for them. I've come to

feel--they are left too much to nurses and strangers.... And then you see he has agreed to nearly everything I had wanted. It wasn't only the personal things--I was anxious about those silly girls--the strikers. I didn't want them to be badly treated. It distressed me to think of them. I don't think you know how it distressed me. And he--he gave way upon all that. He says I may talk to him about the business, about the way we do our business--the kindness of it I mean. And this is why I am back here. Where else could I be?"

"No," said Mr. Brumley still with the utmost reluctance. "I see. Only----"

He paused downcast and she waited for him to speak.

"Only it isn't what I expected, Lady Harman. I didn't think that matters could be settled by such arrangements. It's sane, I know, it's comfortable and kindly. But I thought--Oh! I thought of different things, quite different things from all this. I thought of you who are so beautiful caught in a loveless passionless world. I thought of the things there might be for you, the beautiful and wonderful things of which you are deprived.... Never mind what I thought! Never mind! You've made your choice. But I thought that you didn't love, that you couldn't love--this man. It seemed to me that you felt too--that to live as you are doing--with him--was a profanity. Something--I'd give everything I have, everything I am, to save you from. Because--because I care.... I misunderstood you. I suppose you can--do what you are doing."

He jumped to his feet as he spoke and walked three paces away and turned to utter his last sentences. She too stood up.

"Mr. Brumley," she said weakly, "I don't understand. What do you mean? I have to do what I am doing. He--he is my husband."

He made a gesture of impatience. "Do you understand nothing of love?" he cried.

She pressed her lips together and remained still and silent, dark against the casement window.

There came a sound of tapping from the room above. Three taps and again three taps.

Lady Harman made a little gesture as though she would put this sound aside.

"Love," she said at last. "It comes to some people. It happens. It happens to young people.... But when one is married----"

Her voice fell almost to a whisper. "One must not think of it," she said. "One must think of one's husband and one's duty. Life cannot begin again, Mr. Brumley."

The taps were repeated, a little more urgently.

"That is my husband," she said.

She hesitated through a little pause. "Mr. Brumley," she said, "I want friendship so badly, I want some one to be my friend. I don't want to think of things--disturbing things--things I have lost--things that are spoilt. That--that which you spoke of; what has it to do with me?"

She interrupted him as he was about to speak.

"Be my friend. Don't talk to me of impossible things. Love! Mr. Brumley, what has a married woman to do with love? I never think of it. I never read of it. I want to do my duty. I want to do my duty by him and by my children and by all the people I am bound to. I want to help people, weak people, people who suffer. I want to help him to help them. I want to stop being an idle, useless, spending woman...."

She made a little gesture of appeal with her hands.

"Oh!" he sighed, and then, "You know if I can help you----Rather than distress you----"

Her manner changed. It became confidential and urgent.

"Mr. Brumley," she said, "I must go up to my husband. He will be

impatient. And when I tell him you are here he will want to see you.... You will come up and see him?"

Mr. Brumley sought to convey the struggle within him by his pose.

"I will do what you wish, Lady Harman," he said, with an almost theatrical sigh.

He closed the door after her and was alone in his former study once more. He walked slowly to his old writing-desk and sat down in his familiar seat. Presently he heard her footfalls across the room above. Mr. Brumley's mind under the stress of the unfamiliar and the unexpected was now lapsing rapidly towards the theatrical. "My God!" said Mr. Brumley.

He addressed that friendly memorable room in tones that mingled amazement and wrong. "He is her husband!" he said, and then: "The power of words!" ...

§7

It seemed to Mr. Brumley's now entirely disordered mind that Sir Isaac, propped up with cushions upon a sofa in the upstairs sitting-room, white-faced, wary and very short of breath, was like Proprietorship enthroned. Everything about him referred deferentially to him. Even his

wife dropped at once into the position of a beautiful satellite. His illness, he assured his visitor with a thin-lipped emphasis, was "quite temporary, quite the sort of thing that might happen to anyone." He had had a queer little benumbing of one leg, "just a trifle of nerve fag did it," and the slight asthma that came and went in his life had taken advantage of his condition to come again with a little beyond its usual aggressiveness. "Elly is going to take me off to Marienbad next week or the week after," he said. "I shall have a cure and she'll have a treat, and we shall come back as fit as fiddles." The incidents of the past month were to be put on a facetious footing it appeared. "It's a mercy they didn't crop her hair," he said, apropos of nothing and with an air of dry humour. No further allusion was made to Lady Harman's incarceration.

He was dressed in a lama wool bedroom suit and his resting leg was covered by a very splendid and beautiful fur rug. All Euphemia's best and gayest cushions sustained his back. The furniture had been completely rearranged for his comfort and convenience. Close to his hand was a little table with carefully selected remedies and aids and helps and stimulants, and the latest and best of the light fiction of the day was tossed about between the table, the couch and the floor. At the foot of the couch Euphemia's bedroom writing-table had been placed, and over this there were scattered traces of the stenographer who had assisted him to wipe off the day's correspondence. Three black cylinders and other appliances in the corner witnessed that his slight difficulty in breathing could be relieved by oxygen, and his eyes were regaled by a

great abundance of London flowers at every available point in the room. Of course there were grapes, fabulous looking grapes.

Everything conspired to give Sir Isaac and his ownership the centre of the picture. Mr. Brumley had been brought upstairs to him, and the tea table, with scarcely a reference to anyone else, was arranged by Snagsby conveniently to his hand. And Sir Isaac himself had a confidence--the assurance of a man who has been shaken and has recovered. Whatever tears he had ever shed had served their purpose and were forgotten. "Elly" was his and the house was his and everything about him was his--he laid his hand upon her once when she came near him, his possessiveness was so gross--and the strained suspicion of his last meeting with Mr. Brumley was replaced now by a sage and wizened triumph over anticipated and arrested dangers.

Their party was joined by Sir Isaac's mother, and the sight of her sturdy, swarthy, and rather dignified presence flashed the thought into Mr. Brumley's mind that Sir Isaac's father must have been a very blond and very nosey person indeed. She was homely and practical and contributed very usefully to a conversation that remained a trifle fragmentary and faintly uncomfortable to the end.

Mr. Brumley avoided as much as he could looking at Lady Harman, because he knew Sir Isaac was alert for that, but he was acutely aware of her presence dispensing the tea and moving about the room, being a good wife. It was his first impression of Lady Harman as a good wife and he

disliked the spectacle extremely. The conversation hovered chiefly about Marienbad, drifted away and came back again. Mrs. Harman made several confidences that provoked the betrayal of a strain of irritability in Sir Isaac's condition. "We're all looking forward to this Marienbad expedition," she said. "I do hope it will turn out well. Neither of them have ever been abroad before--and there's the difficulty of the languages."

"Ow," snarled Sir Isaac, with a glance at his mother that was almost vicious and a lapse into Cockney intonations and phrases that witnessed how her presence recalled his youth, "It'll go all right, mother. You needn't fret."

"Of course they'll have a courier to see to their things, and go train de luxe and all that," Mrs. Harman explained with a certain gusto. "But still it's an adventure, with him not well, and both as I say more like children than grown-up people."

Sir Isaac intervened with a crushing clumsiness to divert this strain of explanation, with questions about the quality of the soil in the wood where the ground was to be cleared and levelled for his tennis lawns.

Mr. Brumley did his best to behave as a man of the world should. He made intelligent replies about the sand, he threw out obvious but serviceable advice upon travel upon the continent of Europe, and he tried not to think that this was the way of living into which the sweetest,

tenderest, most beautiful woman in the world had been trapped. He avoided looking at her until he felt it was becoming conspicuous, a negative stare. Why had she come back again? Fragmentary phrases she had used downstairs came drifting through his mind. "I never think of it. I never read of it." And she so made for beautiful love and a beautiful life! He recalled Lady Beach-Mandarin's absurdly apt, absurdly inept, "like Godiva," and was suddenly impelled to raise the question of those strikers.

"Your trouble with your waitresses is over, Sir Isaac?"

Sir Isaac finished a cup of tea audibly and glanced at his wife. "I never meant to be hard on them," he said, putting down his cup. "Never. The trouble blew up suddenly. One can't be all over a big business everywhere all at once, more particularly if one is worried about other things. As soon as I had time to look into it I put things right. There was misunderstandings on both sides."

He glanced up again at Lady Harman. (She was standing behind Mr. Brumley so that he could not see her but--did their eyes meet?)

"As soon as we are back from Marienbad," Sir Isaac volunteered, "Lady Harman and I are going into all that business thoroughly."

Mr. Brumley concealed his intense aversion for this association under a tone of intelligent interest. "Into--I don't quite understand--what

business?"

"Women employees in London--Hostels--all that kind of thing. Bit more sensible than suffragetting, eh, Elly?"

"Very interesting," said Mr. Brumley with a hollow cordiality, "very."

"Done on business lines, mind you," said Sir Isaac, looking suddenly very sharp and keen, "done on proper business lines, there's no end of a change possible. And it's a perfectly legitimate outgrowth from such popular catering as ours. It interests me."

He made a little whistling noise with his teeth at the end of this speech.

"I didn't know Lady Harman was disposed to take up such things," he said. "Or I'd have gone into them before."

"He's going into them now," said Mrs. Harman, "heart and soul. Why! we have to take his temperature over it, to see he doesn't work himself up into a fever." Her manner became reasonable and confidential. She spoke to Mr. Brumley as if her son was slightly deaf. "It's better than his fretting," she said....

§8

Mr. Brumley returned to London in a state of extreme mental and emotional unrest. The sight of Lady Harman had restored all his passion for her, the all too manifest fact that she was receding beyond his reach stirred him with unavailing impulses towards some impossible extremity of effort. She had filled his mind so much that he could not endure the thought of living without hope of her. But what hope was there of her? And he was jealous, detestably jealous, so jealous that in that direction he did not dare to let his mind go. He sawed at the bit and brought it back, or he would have had to writhe about the carriage. His thoughts ran furiously all over the place to avoid that pit. And now he found himself flashing at moments into wild and hopeless rebellion against the institution of marriage, of which he had hitherto sought always to be the dignified and smiling champion against the innovator, the over-critical and the young. He had never rebelled before. He was so astonished at the violence of his own objection that he lapsed from defiance to an incredulous examination of his own novel attitude. "It's not true marriage I object to," he told himself. "It's this marriage like a rat trap, alluring and scarcely unavoidable, so that in we all go, and then with no escape--unless you tear yourself to rags. No escape...."

It came to him that there was at least one way out for Lady Harman: Sir Isaac might die! ...

He pulled himself up presently, astonished and dismayed at the

activities of his own imagination. Among other things he had wondered if by any chance Lady Harman had ever allowed her mind to travel in this same post-mortem direction. At times surely the thing must have shone upon her as a possibility, a hope. From that he had branched off to a more general speculation. How many people were there in the world, nice people, kind people, moral and delicate-minded people, to whom the death of another person means release from that inflexible barrier--possibilities of secretly desired happiness, the realization of crushed and forbidden dreams? He had a vision of human society, like the vision of a night landscape seen suddenly in a lightning flash, as of people caught by couples in traps and quietly hoping for one another's deaths.
"Good Heavens!" said Mr. Brumley, "what are we coming to," and got up in his railway compartment--he had it to himself--and walked up and down its narrow limits until a jolt over a point made him suddenly sit down again. "Most marriages are happy," said Mr. Brumley, like a man who has fallen into a river and scrambles back to safety. "One mustn't judge by the exceptional cases....

"Though of course there are--a good many--exceptional cases." ...

He folded his arms, crossed his legs, frowned and reasoned with himself,--resolved to dismiss post-mortem speculations--absolutely.

He was not going to quarrel with the institution of marriage. That was going too far. He had never been able to see the beginnings of reason in sexual anarchy, never. It is against the very order of things. Man is a

marrying animal just as much as he was a fire-making animal; he goes in pairs like mantel ornaments; it is as natural for him to marry and to exact and keep good faith--if need be with a savage jealousy, as it is for him to have lobes to his ears and hair under his armpits. These things jar with the dream perhaps; the gods on painted ceilings have no such ties, acting beautifully by their very nature; and here on the floor of the world one had them and one had to make the best of them.... Are we making the best of them? Mr. Brumley was off again. That last thought opened the way to speculative wildernesses, and into these Mr. Brumley went wandering with a novel desperate enterprise to find a kind of marriage that would suit him.

He began to reform the marriage laws. He did his utmost not to think especially of Lady Harman and himself while he was doing so. He would just take up the whole question and deal with it in a temperate reasonable way. It was so necessary to be reasonable and temperate in these questions--and not to think of death as a solution. Marriages to begin with were too easy to make and too difficult to break; countless girls--Lady Harman was only a type--were married long before they could know the beginnings of their own minds. We wanted to delay marriage--until the middle twenties, say. Why not? Or if by the infirmities of humanity one must have marriage before then, there ought to be some especial opportunity of rescinding it later. (Lady Harman ought to have been able to rescind her marriage.) What ought to be the marriageable age in a civilized community? When the mind was settled into its general system of opinions Mr. Brumley thought, and then

lapsed into a speculation whether the mind didn't keep changing and developing all through life; Lady Harman's was certainly still doing so.... This pointed to logical consequences of an undesirable sort....

(Some little mind-slide occurred just at this point and he found himself thinking that perhaps Sir Isaac might last for years and years, might even outlive a wife exhausted by nursing. And anyhow to wait for death! To leave the thing one loved in the embrace of the moribund!)

He wrenched his thoughts back as quickly as possible to a disinterested reform of the marriage laws. What had he decided so far? Only for more deliberation and a riper age in marrying. Surely that should appeal even to the most orthodox. But that alone would not eliminate mistakes and deceptions altogether. (Sir Isaac's skin had a peculiar, unhealthy look.) There ought in addition to be the widest facilities for divorce possible. Mr. Brumley tried to draw up a schedule in his head of the grounds for divorce that a really civilized community would entertain. But there are practical difficulties. Marriage is not simply a sexual union, it is an economic one of a peculiarly inseparable sort,--and there are the children. And jealousy! Of course so far as economics went, a kind of marriage settlement might meet most of the difficulties, and as for the children, Mr. Brumley was no longer in that mood of enthusiastic devotion to children that had made the birth of George Edmund so tremendous an event. Children, alone, afforded no reason for indissoluble lifelong union. Face the thing frankly. How long was it absolutely necessary for people to keep a home together for their

children? The prosperous classes, the best classes in the community, packed the little creatures off to school at the age of nine or ten. One might overdo--we were overdoing in our writing nowadays this--philoprogenitive enthusiasm....

He found himself thinking of George Meredith's idea of Ten Year Marriages....

His mind recoiled to Sir Isaac's pillowed-up possession. What flimsy stuff all this talk of altered marriage was! These things did not even touch the essentials of the matter. He thought of Sir Isaac's thin lips and wary knowing eyes. What possible divorce law could the wit of man devise that would release a desired woman from that--grip? Marriage was covetousness made law. As well ask such a man to sell all his goods and give to the poor as expect the Sir Isaacs of this world to relax the matrimonial subjugation of the wife. Our social order is built on jealousy, sustained by jealousy, and those brave schemes we evolve in our studies for the release of women from ownership,--and for that matter for the release of men too,--they will not stand the dusty heat of the market-place for a moment, they wilt under the first fierce breath of reality. Marriage and property are the twin children of man's individualistic nature; only on these terms can he be drawn into societies....

Mr. Brumley found his little scheme for novelties in marriage and divorce lying dead and for the most part still-born in his mind; himself

in despair. To set to work to alter marriage in any essential point was, he realized, as if an ant should start to climb a thousand feet of cliff. This great institution rose upon his imagination like some insurmountable sierra, blue and sombre, between himself and the life of Lady Harman and all that he desired. There might be a certain amount of tinkering with matrimonial law in the next few years, of petty tinkering that would abolish a few pretences and give ease to a few amiable people, but if he were to come back to life a thousand years hence he felt he would still find the ancient gigantic barrier, crossed perhaps by a dangerous road, pierced perhaps by a narrow tunnel or so, but in all its great essentials the same, between himself and Lady Harman. It wasn't that it was rational, it wasn't that it was justifiable, but it was one with the blood in one's veins and the rain-cloud in the sky, a necessity in the nature of present things. Before mankind emerged from the valley of these restraints--if ever they did emerge--thousands of generations must follow one another, there must be tens of thousands of years of struggle and thought and trial, in the teeth of prevalent habit and opinion--and primordial instincts. A new humanity....

His heart sank to hopelessness.

Meanwhile? Meanwhile we had to live our lives.

He began to see a certain justification for the hidden cults that run beneath the fair appearances of life, those social secrecies by which people--how could one put it?--people who do not agree with established

institutions, people, at any rate not merely egoistic and jealous as the crowd is egoistic and jealous, hide and help one another to mitigate the inflexible austerities of the great unreason.

Yes, Mr. Brumley had got to a phrase of that quality for the undiscriminating imperatives of the fundamental social institution. You see how a particular situation may undermine the assumptions of a mind originally devoted to uncritical acceptances. He still insisted it was a necessary great unreason, absolutely necessary--for the mass of people, a part of them, a natural expression of them, but he could imagine the possibility--of 'understandings.' ... Mr. Brumley was very vague about those understandings, those mysteries of the exalted that were to filch happiness from the destroying grasp of the crude and jealous. He had to be vague. For secret and noble are ideas like oil and water; you may fling them together with all the force of your will but in a little while they will separate again.

For a time this dream of an impossible secrecy was uppermost in Mr. Brumley's meditations. It came into his head with the effect of a discovery that always among the unclimbable barriers of this supreme institution there had been,--caves. He had been reading Anatole France recently and the lady of Le Lys Rouge came into his thoughts. There was something in common between Lady Harman and the Countess Martin, they were tall and dark and dignified, and Lady Harman was one of those rare women who could have carried the magnificent name of Thérèse. And there in the setting of Paris and Florence was a whole microcosm of

love, real but illicit, carried out as it were secretly and tactfully, beneath the great shadow of the cliff. But he found it difficult to imagine Lady Harman in that. Or Sir Isaac playing Count Martin's part....

How different were those Frenchwomen, with their afternoons vacant except for love, their detachment, their lovers, those secret, convenient, romantically furnished flats, that compact explicit business of l'amour! He had indeed some moments of regret that Lady Harman wouldn't go into that picture. She was different--if only in her simplicity. There was something about these others that put them whole worlds apart from her, who was held so tethered from all furtive adventure by her filmy tentacles of responsibility, her ties and strands of relationship, her essential delicacy. That momentary vision of Ellen as the Countess Martin broke up into absurdities directly he looked at it fully and steadfastly. From thinking of the two women as similar types he passed into thinking of them as opposites; Thérèse, hard, clear, sensuous, secretive, trained by a brilliant tradition in the technique of connubial betrayal, was the very antithesis of Ellen's vague but invincible veracity and openness. Not for nothing had Anatole France made his heroine the daughter of a grasping financial adventurer....

Of course the cave is a part of the mountain....

His mind drifted away to still more general speculations, and always he

was trying not to see the figure of Sir Isaac, grimly and yet meanly resolute--in possession. Always too like some open-mouthed yokel at a fair who knows nothing of the insult chalked upon his back, he disregarded how he himself coveted and desired and would if he could have gripped. He forgot his own watchful attention to Euphemia in the past, nor did he think what he might have been if Lady Harman had been his wife. It needed the chill veracities of the small hours to bring him to that. He thought now of crude egotism as having Sir Isaac's hands and Sir Isaac's eyes and Sir Isaac's position. He forgot any egotism he himself was betraying.

All the paths of enlightenment he thought of, led to Lady Harman.

§9

That evening George Edmund, who had come home with his mind aglitter with cinematograph impressions, found his father a patient but inattentive listener. For indeed Mr. Brumley was not listening at all; he was thinking and thinking. He made noises like "Ah!" and "Um," at George Edmund and patted the boy's shoulder kindly and repeated words unintelligently, such as, "Red Indians, eh!" or "Came out of the water backwards! My eye!"

Sometimes he made what George Edmund regarded as quite footling comments. Still George Edmund had to tell someone and there was no one

else to tell. So George Edmund went on talking and Mr. Brumley went on thinking.

§10

Mr Brumley could not sleep at all until it was nearly five. His intelligence seemed to be making up at last for years of speculative restraint. In a world for the most part given up to slumber Mr. Brumley may be imagined as clambering hand over fist in the silences, feverishly and wonderfully overtaking his age. In the morning he got up pallid and he shaved badly, but he was a generation ahead of his own Euphemia series, and the school of charm and quiet humour and of letting things slide with a kind of elegant donnishness, had lost him for ever....

And among all sorts of things that had come to him in that vast gulf of nocturnal thinking was some vivid self-examination. At last he got to that. He had been dragged down to very elemental things indeed by the manifest completeness of Lady Harman's return to her husband. He had had at last to look at himself starkly for the male he was, to go beneath the gentlemanly airs, the refined and elegant virilities of his habitual poses. Either this thing was unendurable--there were certainly moments when it came near to being unendurable--or it was not. On the whole and excepting mere momentary paroxysms it was not, and so he had to recognize and he did recognize with the greatest amazement that there could be something else besides sexual attraction and manoeuvring and

possession between a beautiful woman and a man like himself. He loved Lady Harman, he loved her, he now began to realize just how much, and she could defeat him and reject him as a conceivable lover, turn that aside as a thing impossible, shame him as the romantic school would count shame and still command him with her confident eyes and her friendly extended hands. He admitted he suffered, let us rather say he claimed to suffer the heated torments of a passionate nature, but he perceived like fresh air and sunrise coming by blind updrawn and opened window into a foetid chamber, that also he loved her with a clean and bodiless love, was anxious to help her, was anxious now--it was a new thing--to understand her, to reassure her, to give unrequited what once he had sought rather to seem to give in view of an imagined exchange.

He perceived too in these still hours how little he had understood her hitherto. He had been blinded,--obsessed. He had been seeing her and himself and the whole world far too much as a display of the eternal dualism of sex, the incessant pursuit. Now with his sexual imaginings newly humbled and hopeless, with a realization of her own tremendous minimization of that fundamental of romance, he began to see all that there was in her personality and their possible relations outside that. He saw how gravely and deeply serious was her fine philanthropy, how honest and simple and impersonal her desire for knowledge and understandings. There is the brain of her at least, he thought, far out of Sir Isaac's reach. She wasn't abased by her surrenders, their simplicity exalted her, showed her innocent and himself a flushed and congested soul. He perceived now with the astonishment of a man newly

awakened just how the great obsession of sex had dominated him--for how many years? Since his early undergraduate days. Had he anything to put beside her own fine detachment? Had he ever since his manhood touched philosophy, touched a social question, thought of anything human, thought of art, or literature or belief, without a glancing reference of the whole question to the uses of this eternal hunt? During that time had he ever talked to a girl or woman with an unembarrassed sincerity? He stripped his pretences bare; the answer was no. His very refinements had been no more than indicative fig-leaves. His conservatism and morality had been a mere dalliance with interests that too brutal a simplicity might have exhausted prematurely. And indeed hadn't the whole period of literature that had produced him been, in its straining purity and refinement, as it were one glowing, one illuminated fig-leaf, a vast conspiracy to keep certain matters always in mind by conspicuously covering them away? But this wonderful woman--it seemed--she hadn't them in mind! She shamed him if only by her trustful unsuspiciousness of the ancient selfish game of Him and Her that he had been so ardently playing.... He idealized and worshipped this clean blindness. He abased himself before it.

"No," cried Mr. Brumley suddenly in the silence of the night, "I will rise again. I will rise again by love out of these morasses.... She shall be my goddess and by virtue of her I will end this incessant irrational craving for women.... I will be her friend and her faithful friend."

He lay still for a time and then he said in a whisper very humbly: "God help me."

He set himself in those still hours which are so endless and so profitable to men in their middle years, to think how he might make himself the perfect lover instead of a mere plotter for desire, and how he might purge himself from covetousness and possessiveness and learn to serve.

And if very speedily his initial sincerity was tinged again with egotism and if he drowsed at last into a portrait of himself as beautifully and admirably self-sacrificial, you must not sneer too readily at him, for so God has made the soul of Mr. Brumley and otherwise it could not do.